



Indiana's Emergency Communications Strategy is Giving Other States Something to Talk About

by Pamela Barnett

(Oct. 10, 2003) -- Years in the design-phase, Project Hoosier SAFE-T, an initiative of Indiana's local, state and federal public safety agencies to improve communications capabilities among public safety agencies statewide, is closing in on a major construction milestone. It also is making a big impression on other officials charged with implementing their own statewide interoperable voice and data systems.

SAFE-T, which stands for Safety Acting for Everyone -- Together, is Indiana's vision for the next generation of public safety communications in the state. The first phase of a four-phase construction of the system began on schedule in April, placing Indiana at the cusp of establishing a national model for public safety and communications systems. It is a Motorola Astro 800 MHz voice and data system comprised of 129 towers that is available to every local, state and federal public safety agency that chooses to join the system. The overall project is being spearheaded by the Indiana Integrated Public Safety Commission (IPSC), which was created in 1999 to improve coordination among public safety agencies.

SAFE-T's implementation has been praised by the National Governor's Association (NGA), and the project has elicited numerous inquiries from around the country. Federal programs emphasizing effective, interoperable communications systems have recognized SAFE-T including the Public Safety Wireless Network and the National Task Force on Interoperability.

In an interview with **Homeland Security News**, IPSC Executive Director Les Miller, was asked whether Indiana views SAFE-T as a model for other states.

"We have been told that by others including people with the Justice Department" Miller replied. "We've been asked to speak before the League of Cities and a bunch of state governments. And we've been called by other states that had heard we were the model.

"What makes us different" Miller continued, is the inclusiveness of the project, which was built with input from agencies and departments at every level. "We have one of every type [of agency] in the commission."

Another key factor in winning the support of the locals was how IPSC structured the state's relationship to them. There are no user fees, for instance, and locals only had to purchase their user equipment.

The IPSC is in the midst of implementing its "Northern Phase," focusing on building the needed infrastructure in the northeastern region by the end of this year.

Next, the Central Phase is scheduled for completion by the end of 2004. That installation got a head start through a \$5.2 million Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant for upgraded communications as a result of hazards associated with the Newport Ammunition Depot, where deadly VX nerve agent is stored.

The South West Phase is scheduled for completion by the end of 2005. Finally, the South East Phase is scheduled for completion by the end of 2006.

The ISPC knows about tight budgets. It was turned down by Indiana's General Assembly for funding in 1999 and in 2001, but was able through federal grants and other funding to amass \$11 million, which it used to fund an initial demonstration project in Johnson County in the summer of 2000.

The system underwent a trial by fire in September 2002, when a tornado slashed through the area. Using the advanced communications equipment, it took law enforcement officials seven hours to get the situation under control -- compared to the 96 hours it took those officials to stabilize the situation after a smaller tornado in 1996.

"They loved the system in Johnson County," Miller said. The county also estimates it saved more than \$2 million by using Project Hoosier SAFE-T instead of building its own system.

After that, the funding came a bit easier, and in 2002, the legislature approved a bill that directs the IPSC to receive \$1.25 out of the service fee collected on certain Bureau of Motor Vehicle transactions for the next 15 years -- a plan that allocates \$10 million to \$12 million annually for the SAFE-T network for the next 15 years.

It is a funding approach that the NGA recently commended as being especially "creative."

Indiana's congressional delegation also has lent a hand. For the current fiscal year, IPSC received a \$1 million award from the Department of Justice's COPS program, and \$500,000 from the U.S. Department of Transportation. For FY04, the delegation has requested \$5 million through COPS and \$5 million through DOT.

"The feds have been terrific with us," Miller said. "If we get the funding, we're looking at the end of 2006. We could even beat that if the funding stream allows us."

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A Cooperative Approach to Emergency Communications Takes Firm Root in the Midwest

by Pamela Barnett

(Oct. 10, 2003) -- In an acknowledgement that disasters and emergencies have no regard for state borders, a multi-state interoperability compact is taking the concept of integrated communications to new heights.

Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, and Michigan have united their energies and resources to make interoperable communications a reality within each state -- and potentially on a region-wide basis.

The group met for the first time as a consortium in October 2002, but their cooperative efforts reached a new crest just last week, says Les Miller, executive director for the Indiana Integrated Public Safety Commission, which is charged with overseeing the communication upgrades in that state.

Miller told **Homeland Security News** that he and his counterparts from Illinois and Michigan were discussing the possibility of using each others' towers to improve coverage in their respective states. "That's the whole spirit, here," Miller said. "It only makes sense for states to be able to talk to each other."

In what they consider to be an historical initiative -- as well as an unprecedented showing of support and interstate cooperation -- the five states came together last year to form the largest multi-state partnership aimed at integrating public safety communications systems across state lines.

At the physical center of those states is Indiana, whose state-wide interoperable communications initiative, dubbed Project Hoosier SAFE-T, while still in its implementation phase, already has become a model for other states. (See [Indiana's Emergency Communications Strategy is Giving Other States Something to Talk About](#), Oct. 10, 2003).

"Indiana is the center of the universe," joked Miller.

Of the five contiguous states forming the Midwest compact, four states -- Indiana, Ohio, Michigan and Illinois -- have built or are in the process of having SAFE-T project vendor Motorola install statewide digital radio communications systems. The system is a Motorola Astro 800 MHz voice and data system.

"Kentucky wants to build a state-wide system, but hasn't yet decided if it will be able to afford it," Miller said. Miller said the five state representatives showed no signs of hesitation in joining forces. Each state hopes to share bordering tower sites to establish interstate coverage and allow for interstate public safety communications. "There was not a second of turf issues," Miller said of the initial meeting.

When the state compact began last October to explore ways of tying its systems together, one of the first resolutions the members agreed upon was that "we would all work together try to develop an interoperable multi-state system," Miller said. "The second resolution that we agreed [upon] was not to object or interfere with one of the five states' construction of other systems, so long as it did not [conflict with] the first state's system."

Miller told **Homeland Security News** the consortium plans on seeking federal grant money for its group effort. "We're hopeful of getting some attention from the federal government, yes," Miller said, although he conceded that the outcome of such an endeavor is always uncertain. "We're going to ask for money," he emphasized wryly. Together, the team members have sought to attain funding and steeper discounts than any single state has achieved on infrastructure and subscriber equipment. The consortium already has drafted a memorandum of understanding (MOU), through which it has emphasized its common goals.

The next step is to have the MOU signed by all five state governors, and Miller told **Homeland Security News** the compact's expectations are positive. "We recognize that chief executives have many things to handle here, but we're going to try to push it forward as quickly as we can," he added.

In addition, Miller added, "As word got out about the success of the five-state region, virtually every state touching on our five," including Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Tennessee and Pennsylvania, "asked to be involved with the build out. But we wanted to first do our five states and work out the wrinkles before we brought in the others."

Miller said he has been "amazed" by the outside interest and response. "It's like a seedling here, and the seedling grew up and spread."